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ABSTRACT

This paper questions the applicability of middleman minority theory to Chinese and Japanese Americans. The constructional elements of the theory, in its American form, are analyzed in the context of Chinese and Japanese American economic, social, and political conditions. The ethnic group triad (elite-middleman minority-masses) is identified and viewed against actual dyadic ethnic relations. The "model minority" thesis is seen as a link between the presumed middle-class status of the two Asian American groups and the existence of a competitive discriminatory pathology, the primal ingredient of which is proof of one's deprived minority status. This hierarchy of relative social deprivation is suggested as the structural mechanism through which a socioeconomic status bias serves as the estimation of the status of minority groups. (That bias is emphasized by the conspicuous absence of its sociopolitical counterpart, sociopolitical status.) Lastly, the theory is reduced to its central theme: occupational "liquidity" as a function of sojourning. The assumption that Chinese and Japanese Americans are "sojourners," or "strangers," whose occupational preferences are determined by that orientation is challenged. It is argued that the classification and depiction of those two groups as "middleman minorities" are untenable, inaccurate, and based on myth. (Author/CMG)

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by

Eugene Franklin Wong

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ASIAN AMERICAN MIDDLEMAN MINORITY THEORY, THE CONSTRUCTIONAL FRAMEWORK OF AN AMERICAN MYTH

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a critique of Edna Bonacich's article "A Theory of Middleman Minorities," American Sociological Review, 1973, Vol. 38 (October):583-594. It questions the applicability of middleman minority theory to Chinese and Japanese Americans. The constructional elements of the theory, in its American form, are analyzed in the context of Chinese and Japanese American economic, social and political conditions.

The ethnic group triad is identified and viewed against actual dyadic ethnic relations. The "model minority" thesis is seen as a linkage between the presumed middle-class status of the two Asian American groups and the existence of a reverse-reward system. The system's hierarchy of relative social deprivation (discriminatory pathology) is suggested as the structural mechanism through which a socioeconomic status (SES) bias serves as the estimation of the status of minority groups. That bias is emphasized by the conspicuous absence of its sociopolitical counterpart, sociopolitical status (SPS). Lastly, the theory is reduced to its central theme: occupational "liquidity" as a function of sojourning. The assumption that Chinese and Japanese Americans are "sojourners," "strangers," whose occupational preferences are determined by that orientation is challenged. It

is argued that the classification and depiction of those two groups as "middleman minorities" are untenable and inaccurate and based upon myths not verities.

ASIAN AMERICAN MIDDLEMAN MINORITY THEORY, THE CONSTRUCTIONAL FRAMEWORK OF AN AMERICAN MYTH

The classification of Chinese and Japanese Americans as "middleman minorities," with the inherent potential to include other Asian American groups, has been accepted relatively unscathed since its formal debut in the early 1970's.[1] The phrase Asian American middleman minority is an expression of the larger more universally familiar construction, Middleman Minority Theory. It is used throughout this text to pinpoint termirologically the middleman theory as aimed at Asian Americans. The purpose of this paper is to critique what has been identified as Asian American middleman theory and to respond to the arbitrariness with which the theory has been applied to the Chinese and Japanese Americans in particular.

In especially close association with the assumption that the Chinese and Japanese have been and are middleman minorities in the United States, still another misleading classification, also unscathed over time, has prevailed of the Chinese and Japanese that--given its dissemination, timing and durability--has set the groundwork for the development and acceptance of the Asian American middleman minority theory: namely, the so-called "model minority" thesis. In consideration of both the theory and the thesis, the manuscript's intention is to delineate the essential elements peculiar to those constructs and to demonstrate the inconsistencies of applying them to the Chinese and Japanese American minorities.

MAJOR CONSTRUCTIONAL ELEMENTS OF MIDDLEMAN MINORITY THEORY

The label "middleman minority" is perhaps the most widely known and accepted designation of identifiable ethnic or racial groups in various societies around the world who share, occupy and fulfill similar sets of social roles. In broad terms, it stations them as the middle segment of a triadic social group configuration. However, other designations have been proffered.[2]

The theory was initially developed out of analysis of, and was restricted to, peasant-feudal types rather than to industrialized types of societies.[3] With the passage of time, the more industrialized societies have been included as hosting middleman minorities. Regardless of the type of society involved, there obtain major constructional elements that are basic to middleman theory. These elements, although somewhat modifiable and elastic, are not open to substantive alteration without undermining the integrity of the theory itself. Moreover, in the tradition of other sociohistorical-socioeconomic theories, because middleman theory is an attempt to segregate Chinese and Japanese Americans in a category separate from that which houses America's other racial minority groups, middleman minority theory contains major constructional elements that must work in combination to produce the validity for which they were theoretically designed.

These elements must not be considered in isolation as otherwise unattached characteristics which when observed singly are elemental, but when taken together do not act in concert to satisfy theoretical relationships.

Whether peasant-feudal or industrialized, the societies in which middleman minorities reside are marked by ethnic or racial heterogeneity. The middleman minorities are identifiable as one of several ethnic or racial groups, and in the context of their assumed position, are identifiable as one segment of a triadically structured intergroup configuration. The triad itself is the by-product of a manifest bifurcation of the society into two primary groups. The elite constitute the uppermost group of the pyramidally shaped society and enjoy overall social power and prestige. The masses are compressed at the bottom of society, experiencing deprivation in all spheres of social exchange and structure. There is constant strain and hostility between the masses and the elite, the common strategic intent of which, despite absolute power differentials, is each group's desire to give less to and to take more from the opposing end. The otherwise bilateral social pattern is trifurcated by the existence of the middleman minority whose status in general is neither that of the elite nor the masses, but whose origin may have been more akin to the latter than to the former. Nonetheless, the middleman group is considered to be a foreign, an alien entity by both the elite and the masses. When seen in light of the intensity of the relationship between the elite and the masses, the middleman minority is, to all intents and purposes, perceived by the larger contending ends as being an invalid candidate for consideration as a legitimate part of the mechanics of state and society.

The middleman minority may be present (perhaps as long as some of the other ethnic groups composing the masses, and perhaps as long as the elite, especially in colonial settings) but is not accepted by either the elite or the masses, no matter how significant the middleman minority's contributions to society may have been, or how substantive that minority's social contributions may continue to be. When viewed broadly, it is the bi-ethnic/bi-racial relationship and mentality between the elite and the masses, and the attending confrontation over social ascendancy, that prohibits the trichotomous middleman minority from achieving a status other than that of an intermediate third party, a status synonymous with alienage.

Despite the middleman minority's exclusion from the decision-making and control positions of society, there is one area expressly open to that group, to the point of monopoly or near-monopoly. Perhaps because of a traditional socially negative attitude toward entrepreneurship among both the elite and the masses, the economic sector of society is the most fruitful habitation of upward financial and social mobility for the middleman minority. In fact, the backbone of middleman minority theory can be said to be its emphasis upon the middleman minority's role as an economic factor in the relations between the elite and the masses. That the middleman minority is first and above all an economic creature speaks to the nature of its survival within the trichotomy. And the survival of the middleman minority, in its economic niche, is a function of a number of factors and characteristics which, on balance, determine the role the middleman is most adroitly suited to

occupy and fulfill. In broad terms, the middleman minority finds itself locked between the elite and the masses, whose perceptions of the middleman are bilaterally nativist and exclusionist and latently hostile. Consequently, the middleman in order to withstand both the overt social limitations placed upon him and the covert animosities directed toward him must possess what has been referred to as a "high adaptive capacity," which is the product of "a cultural heritage that has been used as an adaptive mechanism."[4] The assumed culturally derived high adaptive capacity is not only a protective coping armament crucial to the survival of the middleman minority, but also a unique cultural device that the masses either do not possess or, for reasons unexplained, cannot possess, and the elite, in respect to its position in society, does not have to possess or will not possess. Such a device, according to middleman theorists, is the sole property of the middleman minority group.

The nativist attitude of the elite and the masses is fed by the belief that the middleman minority group is a collective sojourner. Its main purpose is to exploit the wealth and resources of the society and then to return to a foreign land. Nativism is coupled with an especial ambivalence toward the economic sector, particularly in its capitalist form and the potentiality for societal exploitation, and the kind of persons who would willingly enter that sector. Although the elite may have an occupational aversion to entrepreneurship as well as a distaste for any sector that would necessitate substantive contact with the lower classes, the masses may not by tradition

or training, or by inclination resultant of a cultural repellency similar to that of the elite toward entrepreneurship, be equipped to enter that sector on a competitive basis. Thus, while there may be manifest animosity toward there may also be considerable envy of the middleman minority group, who by circumstances created by the other two groups is willing to enter the commercial area (the only one open to it with any degree of internal equality), by both the elite and the masses.

Having worked its way into the economic sector, often times from positions as manual laborers and menials, the middleman minority group, as a presumed sojourner, garners as much immediate wealth as possible without establishing permanent roots in the society. It utilizes its intermediate status and economic power to invest its time, talent and resources by choosing "select occupations,"[5] among them the "independent professions,"[6] the shared characteristics of which are literal mobility and "liquidity."[7] Conscious of its tenuous status as a minority who could conceivably be ejected by the elite or the masses or both, the middleman minority group seeks out those occupations that involve a minimal amount of fixed investment and a maximal amount of liquidity. By so doing, the middleman minority group reinforces the elite's and the masses' perceptions of it as an alien contingent, a pariah whose relationship to and trademark upon society is unconscionably parasitical. The middleman minority is thought to have neither allegiance nor loyalty to the society in which it resides.

Once lodged in the economic sector, the middleman minority monopolizes the liquid occupations, utilizing family and ethnic

members within the monopolies as a way of cutting costs and establishing and consolidating a comparative advantage. Intra-occupationally, the middleman minority creates a vertical structure the purpose of which is to guarantee mutual ethnic supply and support within the monopolies. Inter-occupationally, the middleman minority creates a horizontal system of guilds whose main purpose is to facilitate and coordinate services and resources and to control intra-ethnic competition, while strengthening its collective position with regard to the elite and the masses.

To expand its worth, the middleman minority practices personal thrift, even niggardliness, and delayed social gratification. This adds to the impression that it is a sojourner and parasite determined not to invest substantively in the host society. When it does invest, it does so in the person of sending money derived from the host society to its foreign homeland. In like fashion, the middleman minority exploits to its own advantage the body of the masses by charging exorbitant rates on services rendered, goods supplied, and interest on money lent. It undercuts existing business competitors engendering hatred and envy among the masses, and disgust and admiration among the elite. In a word, the middleman minority group in its adroit manner of survival within the trichotomy is witnessed as a social evil whose necessity as a factor in the economy is a contradiction laced with ambivalence.

The middleman minority is believed to be a group programmed by its cultural characteristics to occupy and fulfill its role in

society at large. Hence it is assumed, by middleman theorists, that different social environments do not determine the social position of those ethnic or racial groups who become middleman minorities. On the contrary, despite dissimilarities as well as similarities in social environments within different societies, it is a genetic-like belief (a genetically predetermined inevitability) that "these same groups become middlemen wherever they go."[8] (Italics added.)

Exceeded in importance only by its dominance of the economic sector of society, the middleman minority group, as an adjunct to its intermediate position, occupies and fulfills yet another role thought to be primary to its relationship with the elite and the masses as well as central to the relations between the masses and the elite. If its monopoly of at least considerable areas of the economic sector constitutes the most significant dimension of the middleman minority group's existence, then the most outstanding dynamic of that dimension is the go-between facility of the group in the relations between the masses and the elite. In fact, the middleman minority group is believed to be the masses' "primary source of contact with the elite."[9] (Italics added.)

In the context of its intermediate economic position, the middleman minority group not only comes into extensive social contact with both the elite and the masses, but also on a mutually exclusive level serves as the major social vehicle through which the masses interface with the elite. Fulfilling a dual purpose, the middleman minority group acts as a kind of transmission belt through which goods and services of a variety otherwise unattainable pass from the elite to the masses. At the

same time, the middleman functions as a kind of buffer group or so-called social "shock absorber," the instrumentality of which is utilized "in preserving the stability of the system in times of stress"[10] between the elite and the masses. Thus, although on the one hand the middleman minority is thought to be the group within the triad that is subject to suspicion, mistrust and hostility, it is on the other hand the single group capable of absorbing enmity and stress between the other two groups.

However, the presumed stabilizing influence of the middleman minority group does not stabilize or strengthen its own position within society, for regardless of its supposed buffer or absorbent capacity, it remains the most likely "target of aggression,"[11] the object of persecution, from either the elite or the masses. This is because the middleman minority is seen as being favored by or is itself favorably disposed toward one or the other groups. There is confluence of contradiction inherent in the middleman minority group's role as a presumed combination socioeconomic/sociopolitical, transmission belt/shock absorber between the elite and the masses. Although the middleman minority group is a factor in system stability, its own role-playing and placement within the system characterize it as the group most given to intergroup instability and persecution. As such, coupled with its numerical weakness, it makes an ideal scapegoat for socioeconomic-sociopolitical difficulties and conflicts within society between the elite and the masses.

To all intents and purposes, then, the constructional elements of middleman minority theory depict the middleman

minority group as occupying and fulfilling a most precarious role in society. Of the many perceptions that the elite and the masses might have of the middleman minority, the single outstanding perception that they no doubt do have is that of a despicable social intruder whose embedment in society is at once as repellent and devious as it is useful and important. The middleman minority is viewed ambivalently by both sides. To the masses, the middleman is, by the nature of his livelihood and practice, a repulsive manipulator of things. He is an exploitative and usurious parasite equal to the elite in his predatory techniques. Predation itself, of which the masses feel they are the sole victims, is the linkage connecting the middleman minority group and the elite together as social oppressors, repressors and suppressors. The middleman minority is, whatever contradictions may persist between it and the elite, in mainfest league with the elite. But whereas the elite may be appreciated for its absolutely pure form of dominance of and inhumanity toward the masses, the middleman minority is loathed for its subservience to and opportunist alliance with the elite. Under ideal conditions favorable to the masses, the middleman minority group should be definitively punished for its social machinations, and perhaps even expelled for its national disloyalty.

To the elite, the middleman minority, given its role, is a particularly purposeful tool with which the masses can be furrowed and heeled without extending the manifest presence of the elite to every quarter of the masses' daily existence. In this sense, the middleman minority is no more socially acceptable

than the masses, and is therefore appropriately suited to assume a kind of liaison with the masses. However, the otherwise remarkable commercial qualities demonstrated by the middleman minority in its relations with the masses is interpreted as an ultimate threat to the security of the elite itself. If there is a qualitative force within society capable of literally supplanting the elite, it is the middleman minority group.[12] In its own way the middleman minority is as much an immediate rival as are the masses. It is in the interest of the elite to prohibit the middleman minority group from infiltrating those elevated positions of decision-making and social control. In short, the middleman minority group is destined to hover somewhere below the elite and somewhere above the masses, doing whatever it must and offending whomever it must in order to survive within the social triad in which it finds itself.

ORIGIN OF THE AMERICAN MYTH: THE OVERSEAS CHINESE OF SOUTHEAST ASIA

The belief that the Chinese and Japanese Americans are middleman minority groups has its origins in descriptions of the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia.[13] The labeling of these Chinese as "The Jews of the East"[14] implies as much latent antiSemitism as antiSinicism. And reference to the Japanese as "the Jews of the Orient"[15] shares a common genesis. The extent to which American Asians have been arbitrarily linked with foreign Asians, in a kind of international mixed imagery that depicts them as aliens, has yet to be fully investigated.[16] However, it can be assumed that the middleman minority status of

the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia provided American social scientists, of both European and Asian descent, an incentive as well as a presumably applicable framework of analysis within which to classify the Chinese and Japanese Americans as middleman minorities.[17]

The most durable reference to the overseas Chinese of Southeast Asia as a middleman minority group was presented by J.S. Furnivall. In addressing the issues of concern to Indonesia, with implications for all the areas of Southeast Asia in which the Chinese were represented as a minority, he observed:

> The Chinese...acts as a middleman between European and native, tending to be a focus for the animosity of both, and yet at the same time a buffer, averting the direct collision of their conflicting interests.[18]

The Chinese were depicted as being sojourners,[19] despite the fact that they and Chinese influence had been present in the area for hundreds of years. It was contended that their concerns, occupations and activities centered in the commercial sector and were highly exploitative and capitalistic oriented. It was argued that with the establishment of representative institutions, the Chinese minority was drawn "into alliance with Europeans against the numerical superiority and separate interests of the natives."[20]

Other middleman minority enthusiasts have reinforced the image of the overseas Chinese as a middleman in Southeast Asia. In brief outline, the Chinese demonstrate the essential elements of a middleman minority group. Throughout those countries of Southeast Asia in which there is a Chinese minority, the vast majority of the employed Chinese have concentrated in the

economic sector to the point of near dominance, although it should be pointed out that many of the Southeast Asian governments have taken steps to limit the influence of the Chinese in the economy. As a presumed transmission belt, the Chinese are thought to be in a virtual alliance with Europeans. In fact, the Chinese middleman "rarely has face-to-face relations with a European," whereas "he is likely to have contacts with (the Southeast Asians) every day."[21] Since the independence of the Southeast Asian countries and the diminution of the colonialist population, the Chinese could not possibly by theoretical definition fulfill the role of a middleman. Rather, their role is simply one of a persecuted ethnic minority. However, this has not catalyzed a reevaluation of the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia. The Chinese, today, are usually in a bilateral relationship with the indigenous population of a given Southeast Asian country. But the dyadic social group configuration has not changed the Southeast Asians' perceptions of the Chinese minority.

From the Southeast Asian peoples' perspective, members of the ethnic Chinese communities are resented socially for admitted "economic reasons" and mistrusted politically (with nationalistic bias) "because they are opportunists."[22] Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China, they are also assumed to be communist sympathizers.[23] However, the various economic, political and nationalistic rationales justifying the mistreatment of and discrimination against the ethnic Chinese i Southeast Asia have their real antiSinitic prejudices imprinted

in the historical past as a result of the Europeans' fear and dread of the Chinese as potential rivals. That is, "discrimination against Chinese is not a new phenomenon in Southeast Asian history."[24] AntiSinicism as an offshoot of white racism, for example, was transplanted to the Philippines by the Spanish, complete with antiSinitic pogroms fashioned on the "fear of China as a mighty power."[25]

Likewise, the English, Dutch, Portuguese and other Europeans who colonized Southeast Asia, while using the Chinese as middlemen, created antiSinitic images and biases against the Chinese among the indigenous populations as a way of decreasing independent Chinese influence in the area. Such influence was thought to be too competitive with the economic and political advantages of the Europeans. The age-old ambivalence of the Europeans toward the Chinese is reflected in the Southeast Asians' conspicuous despising of the Chinese in the local economy coupled with a parallel envy of and respect for the Chinese minority's "commercial acumen."[26] In general, the Chinese are ambivalently detested for their virtues and envied for their shortcomings by the Southeast Asians.

To compensate for Chinese strength in the economic sector, the Southeast Asians have concentrated their attention in those areas in which the more physically manifest internal power of state is vested. Especially in the political sphere, often synonymous with the military, the Southeast Asians are dominant. Although the Chinese minority forms "the commercial middle class throughout most of Southeast Asia,...the government of almost every country...is remarkably free of local Chinese."[27] In

some countries the Chinese are barred from equal representation and participation in the political order. The educational emphasis so intrinsic to Chinese culture is intercepted by political legislation designed to favor the respective majorities. The assumed strengths of the overseas Chinese (business, education and culture) are, in fact, the most tenuous attributes. The political and military forces of a given Southeast Asian country can deal with Chinese shopkeepers, students and cultural celebrations in the person of antiSinitic violence. The so-called anti-Communist purge in Indonesia, in 1965, and the ongoing Vietnamese ejection of ethnic Chinese are but two of the most recent of such large-scale pogroms.

The overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia have been cited as the classic model of the middleman minority. However, serious reevaluation of the status of the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia should be initiated, if only because of the dyadic (not triadic) group configuration extant there today. Given the durability of the image of the overseas Chinese, it is likely that no such initiative will be taken, and that the Chinese will continue to be a minority on whose behalf there is little outrage voiced or sympathy given despite eruptions of sometimes genocidal antiSinicism. Nevertheless, an attempt to extend the middleman theory to the United States so as to include and incorporate the Chinese and Japanese Americans is an entirely different affair. It is an affected undertaking, the unexamined assumptions of which are of such mythical proportions that Asian American social, economic, and political history and reality as shaped by

American anti-Asian racism cannot have been considered in proper perspective.

THE NEW ANTI-ASIANISM: THE "MODEL MINORITY" THESIS

In examining the extension of middleman minority theory to America, the most immediate constructional element to locate is the group triad. Even in the case of the overseas Chinese of Southeast Asia there has been a shift from triadic to dyadic group relationships. Those Chinese have become a persecuted ethnic minority because of their group characteristics--not their group function. Yet, they are still labeled middleman minorities. That the triadic status gap, once filled by the Chinese between the elite and the masses, no longer exists in its pre-independence form has not altered attitudes regarding the status of the ethnic Chinese minority. Middleman minority enthusiasts have changed the rules of the game. Rather than dealing with the issue of dyadic relationships and their impact of the status of former middleman minorities, they simply declare that middleman minorities "persist beyond the status gap."[28] Such a declaration denies the possibility of change in the social function and status of groups such as the overseas Chinese. It suggests--once a middleman minority, always a middleman minority. More importantly, it sidesteps the fact that in dyadic configurations there is no middle group.

The elimination of the fundamental element--the intermediate economic/social buffer function of the middleman minority--creates a completely different emphasis. A <u>description</u> of <u>group</u>

characteristics--rather than a demonstration of group function--becomes the pivot point around which the entire theory revolves. The social function of the group is dropped. In its place a single group characteristic is isolated, namely, occupational liquidity. "In other words, the term `middleman minorities' is really a misnomer. The more general occupational characteristic of these groups is liquidity."[29] (Italics added.) The presumed reasons for the group's emphasis upon occupational liquidity are 1) the group's sojourning, which motivates it to invest in occupations that are portable, while avoiding those investments (e.g., land ownership) that would tie it to the host society, and 2) its fear of being expelled from the host society by the elite or the masses. For in such a case, portable occupations (without fixed capital) can be picked up and fled with. The theory reduced to its barest skin and bones, liquidator groups (middleman minorities) are permanent alien sojourners whose occupational "niche" is ultimately contingent upon their sojourning.

Are the Chinese and Japanese Americans so-called middleman minorities or, for want of a better appellative identity, liquidator groups? According to middleman enthusiasts they are. Yet the evidence they submit, and the logic with which it is submitted, is presumptuous at best and erroneous at worst. In locating the basic constructional element in the theory (the group triad), it is asserted that "the Asian (American) is currently a very important `pawn' in the racist strategy that is ongoing in the United States today."[30] Even if the pawn analogy were true, and there is no evidence to suggest that it is, being

a pawn is hardly proof of fulfilling the entire social function associated with middleman minorities. At best, the pawn analogy would constitute a minute tactical maneuver within the entire middleman social strategy. The major question to be answered, however, is between whom are the Chinese and Japanese Americans middlemen? Given the American biracial mentality and outlook (white and black), it can be inferred that the presumed elite in American society are the whites and the supposed masses are the blacks.

The assertion that the "Chinese often function as middlemen in a multiracial society where social relations between whites and blacks are strained and hostile"[31] has nowhere been empirically and consistently proved over time in the specific and complete context of middleman minority theory. Likewise, the declaration that (Asian Americans as a whole) "are often used as a buffer by the Establishment in the confrontation between racial groups..."[32] does not even begin to identify which racial groups. In such an ethnically heterogeneous society as America, one could as easily assume, elevating oneself beyond the biracial mentality, that the masses are Hispanics (a diverse group totally ignored by the theorists in identifying America's masses) and the buffer the Jews. Have Chinese and Japanese Americans been used as buffers in confrontations between whites and blacks or between radical non-whites and the establishment? Clearly they were <u>not</u> during the 1965 Watts Riots. Nor have they been during any minor or major confrontation between blacks and the police, national guard or any other representatives of the so-called Establishment. They were <u>not</u> used as a buffer during the

turbulent 1960's. Nor were they or have they been used for such a purpose during the 1970's or early 1980's for whatever reasons.

Such arbitrary assertions depict all Asian American groups as minor ethnic appendages whose impact upon and place within American society--particularly its ethnic relations--are superficial and manipulable. The emphasis upon white-black relations and the relegation of Chinese and Japanese Americans to a position (with assumed middleman function) between whites and blacks carries critical implications for the way in which Asian Americans have been viewed as non-white/non-black American minorities. If nothing else, it disfranchises Chinese and Japanese Americans as independent, separate and racially identifiable segments of America's ethnic mix.

The "model minority" thesis, replete with positive stereotypes,[33] has served as an informal linchpin, the ultimate expression of which has been to link standard images of the overseas Chinese minority of Southeast Asia to Chinese and Japanese Americans. The tenets of the thesis have been constructed to phase out the two Asian American groups as legitimate minorities, in effect excluding them as recipients of governmental and non-governmental programs (among other things)--notably in the areas of employment, training, and funding--that have been established to benefit minorities.[34] The thesis depicts the Chinese and Japanese Americans as being ethnic groups that are socially, culturally and economically insular from the vestiges of past discrimination. It has also instituted the belief that today the two groups are free from racial

discrimination and the social devastation that accompanies it. This popularly accepted notion was solely the conception of non-Asians who followed a policy of talking about the Chinese and Japanese Americans, rather than talking to them.

Thus, it was enthusiastically concluded that one should "Visit `Chinatown U.S.A.' and you find an important racial minority pulling itself up from hardship and discrimination to become a model of self-respect and achievement in today's America."[35] That different Chinatowns are different was ignored, as if because all Chinese look alike, all Chinatowns must be alike. More importantly, however, is the intrinsic conviction that the burden of proof for eliminating racism and discrimination should not be placed upon the shoulders of those who practice them. On the contrary, it is the express purpose of the victims of racism and discrimination to overcome them. Rather than blaming the victim, the "model minority" thesis sets its own unique structural trait, namely, praising the victim. The Chinese American ghettos are praiseworthy ethnic enclaves, for "in crime-ridden cities, Chinese districts turn up as islands of peace and stability."[36] In like fashion, the Japanese Americans are pronounced "clean, decent and law-abiding citizens in all American communities"[37] and "race discrimination against Japanese-Americans is virtually non-existent today."[38] Such propositions lead to their ulterior conclusions: white racism has been eliminated in American society or Asian Americans have miraculously become white racism-proof. Thus, the thesis encourages otherwise condescending flattery to prevail in the

person of such credit-to-your-race observations as: "by any criterion of good citizenship...(Japanese Americans) are better than any other group in our society, including native-born whites."[39]

The positive stereotypical imagery integral to the construction and establishment of the "model minority" thesis marks a 180-degree turn in the perception of Chinese and Japanese Americans.[40] Historically, the basis of the formal anti-Asiatic movement in America, beginning in the mid-1800's, found its substance and support in the depiction of those groups as economic and social competitors whose progressive advancement would threaten dominant American society. The reason was an alleged unfair advantage this took of and infringement exacted from the quality of life of white Americans.[41] Group characteristics such as thrift, industriousness, perseverance, delayed gratification, and investment and expenditure of hard work and long hours were viewed as undesirable racial and cultural peculiarities of the Chinese and Japanese immigrants. These social characteristics were not hailed as parallel cultural values of the Protestant Ethic. Rather they were considered unconscionable liabilities and vices of race contact with Asians that must impact retrogressively on white Americans. The Chinese and Japanese were denigrated as being immoral, vulgar, filthy, libidinous, vicious and cruel. Because of these ascribed racial and cultural deficits (many others were added), the Chinese and Japanese were denied naturalized citizenship until the passage of the McCarran-Walter Immigration Act, 1952.[42]

A HIERARCHY OF DISCRIMINATORY PATHOLOGY

Not until the creation of the "model minority" thesis were those intensely despised deficits--and the people who possessed and practiced them--transformed into commendable, laudable ethnic virtues. The change in America's perception of the Chinese and Japanese, however, augured by way of positive stereotypes a more subtle continuation of anti-Asianism. Unlike the other racial minorities, the Chinese and Japanese Americans were "considered in a special manner--minorities, yes; but oppressed, no."[43] Consequently, during the 1960's, the most demonstrable decade of American civil rights and civil liberties advancement for the other racial minorities, the Chinese and Japanese Americans were declassified as legitimate minorities. At a critical time in American social history, when there appeared to be the beginning of an honest reckoning with historical injustice and the potential redressing of socioeconomic and political discrimination, the Asian American communities were collectively mandated by whites to be free of the all-encompassing problems besetting minority communities across the country. Rather than being seen as groups located between whites and blacks, Chinese and Japanese Americans were for the most part ignored in what became institutionally the mainstream of American ethnic consciousness.

The preoccupation with the relations between whites and blacks was announced by the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders' (the Kerner Report) conclusion that both identified white racism as a causative factor in the inequality between

whites and blacks, and warned that America was becoming two societies, "one Black, one white--separate and unequal."[44] Even more importantly, the white-black racial dyad produced a system of competitive discriminatory pathology (a system of one-downsmanship) the primal ingredient of which was proof of one's deprived minority status. It was--and still is--from that system that the Chinese and Japanese Americans were effectively barred as participants and competitors because of the acceptability of the "model minority" thesis.

That the Chinese and Japanese Americans have only recently been labeled model minorities is historically verified by the protracted anti-Asiatic movement in America. This movement in its formal legislative form, and therefore its most conservatively estimated duration, lasted nearly sixty-two years beginning in 1882 with the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act and ending with the token repeal of the entire series of restriction/exclusion legislation in 1943.

That there were numerous bills passed affecting the Chinese and Japanese individually and jointly is recognized; yet space here cannot allow for their enumeration. So, too, it would be misleading even to suggest that Asian-American immigrants and their governments stood idly by in the heat of anti-Asiatic hysteria. The Chinese Six Companies, as representatives of the Chinese immigrants, were routine in their protests and stubborn in their demands against anti-Chinese activities and sentiment. The fact that they were not backed by a strong home government able to challenge American domestic policy toward the Chinese but added to their perseverance and courage in face of overwhelming

odds. The Japanese, too, benefiting from an industrially and militarily strong home government were unrelenting in opposing anti-Japanese legislation and indignities. The Japanese government was steadfast in equating the treatment and status of its nationals in the United States with the honor of Japan in the international community.

In the long run, however, neither the Chinese nor Japanese governments was able to halt the inevitable consequences of the anti-Asiatic movement in the United States. Outnumbered, isolated, vulnerable in every regard, the Chinese and Japanese immigrants were soberly intimidated and restrained in an American "society that punished those who dared to speak out or call attention to themselves."[45] Ironically, the biracial frenzy of the 1960's, generating the one-downsmanship system, created a social conscience the attention of which epitomized the adage: the wheel that squeaks the loudest gets the oil. In an attempt to deal with inequality and social injustice, the system of competitive discriminatory pathology, the "reverse reward system,"[45] evolved. Consecrated by the Great Society and the War on Poverty, the system solicits, as part of its tacit machinery, a significant degree of discriminatory pathology from minorities, if those minorities are to be targeted for assistance. Pathological one-dowsmanship marks the competitive nature of the reverse reward system. That is to say, "If a group can show that it has three times the national unemployment rate, five times the crime rate, two times the broken family rate, one and a half times the school dropout rate, ad nauseam, the chances for

obtaining goverment funding are excellent."[47]

The Chinese and Japanese Americans have been proclaimed to be so successful as to be minorities in name only. They are positioned at the lowest level of a reverse minority hierarchy. In keeping with the white-black dyad, blacks are stationed at the top of the hierarchy. Even some Asian Americans and professional observers of Asian Americans adopt the popular, unexamined belief that Chinese and Japanese are by every social indicator a relative success.[48] The power of positive stereotypes inherent in the "model minority" thesis remains difficult to resist. Unlike other racial minorities, the Chinese and Japanese appear to be devoid of a discriminatory pathology. The reverse reward system bypasses, for the most part, groups that do not competitively present an agenda of relative social deprivation. Such an agenda, according to the logic of one-downsmanship, must make it appear that the presenter group is more of a minority than other minorities.

The racial and cultural virtues associated with the Chinese and Japanese are liabilities in a reverse reward system; the unwritten rules of the system are not favorable to minorities who labor to effect an improvement in their socioeconomic status by individual effort. According to the system, "if a people try to be self-sustaining, self-reliant, industriousness--even to the extent of lowering their sights considerably and accepting work far beneath their qualifications so that they need not be unemployed or apply for welfare--they are bypassed"[49] as legitimate minorities.

THE SOJOURNER IMAGE AS THE "LOCUS CLASSICUS" OF THE MIDDLEMAN MINORITY MYTH

The "model minority" thesis serves as a middleman minority bridge the purpose of which is to set up the Chinese and Japanese Americans as presumed intermediate groups between whites and blacks. The system of competitive discriminatory pathology via the acceptance of the thesis excludes the Asian American groups as legitimate (synonymous with "deprived" or "needy") minorities. Yet there is no evidence to support the assertion that the Chinese or Japanese functionally fill a middleman role or are accepted socially and racially as a part of the white-black racial dyad. Even in such case-specific studies as the Mississippi Delta Chinese, the belief that members of that group are located between whites and blacks in their social relations is sobered by the fact that such "a biracial system of etiquette has no provision for a third race."[50] A Delta Chinese women herself epitomizes the observation that the Chinese exist outside the dyad, for as she says, "Delta whites think there are only two races in the world and do not know what to do with the Chinese."[51]

The biracial mentality creates its own ambivalence and confusion. If one is neither white nor black, the immediate assumption is that one must (to quiet dissonance) fit somewhere in-between. That one does not fit in-between poses the threat of triracial or multiracial intrusion into the intimacy of the biracial relationship. Exclusion from the dyad is the most acceptable policy for maintaining the biracialism. That middleman enthusiasts have attempted to use the Mississippi

Chinese to generalize about the entire Chinese American population is instructive not only in exposing the tenuousness of middleman theory as extended to America, but also crucial to pinpointing the emphasis upon the stereotypical sojourner image of Chinese and Japanese Americans as the locus from which the theory is expanded. The axiomatic assertion that certain ethnic groups "become middlemen wherever they go"[52] (Italics added.) is close to Social Darwinist in its finality.

What determines with such conclusiveness that these groups must become middlemen wherever they go? Is it cultural traits? Is it situational opportunities? It is generally agreed that middleman status cannot "be explained by imagined or real cultural traits of the entering sojourners."[53] A situational "niche"[54] is important but cannot stand in isolation from some basic group characteristics. Although there is not space here to list the multitude of cultural and situational factors that partially account for the presumed creation of middleman minorities, it can be said that they are reduced to epiphenomenal status when seen against the recurring and single outstanding phenomenon: namely, the image of the middleman as a "sojourner," a permanent alien within his host society.[55]

The very ambivalence with which the sojourner phenomenon is handled speaks to its overwhelming importance to the theory itself. The acknowledgement that "sojourning is not a sufficient condition of the middleman form in that there are sojourners who do not become middlemen"[56] is undermined by the theory. It stipulates that sojourning "leads the individual to select

occupations"[57] that because of sojourning must have a particular character. The character is that they must be "portable or easily liquidated."[58] Sojourning, then, is the phenomenon that "creates a preference for liquidity."[59] And liquidity, as was mentioned earlier in the text, was isolated as the primary characteristic of these groups. Middleman minorities was even considered to be a "misnomer."

It is the sojourner issue that is of utmost importance, then, in discussing Chinese and Japanese Americans. Although this issue is of great depth, it will be trimmed to demonstrate the way in which sojourning has been associated with Chinese and Japanese.

Why such great emphasis is placed upon the early Chinese and Japanese as sojourners is unclear. It would lead the uninformed to suspect that sojourning per se were the special domain of those two groups. But in fact, it has been a historical practice and attitudinal characteristic of white ethnic groups in America. Stein and Hill document the phenomenon with acuity and perspective as part of the dynamic process of becoming and being accepted as Americans.[60]

Whites are credited with assuming an American identity that "gradually became an intrinsic part of the self and was no longer an extrinsic occupational hazard that was the source of a few years' income."[61] But Asians are simply dismissed as having had an "ambivalence towards the place of residence."[62] The sojourner image of Asian Americans is dwelt upon with an immutable passion.[63] No such domestic, international, racial or cultural presumptuousness is directed at the "English- or Spanish-speaking

populations."[64] Existing outside the white-black racial dyad, Chinese Americans are assumed to be aliens, regardless of their American identity:

> An American-born Jew is not asked, "How long have you been in this country?" Nor is he complimented on how well he speaks English without an accent. An American black is not associated with any of the African nations....An ethnic Chinese, however, is taken for a foreigner forever....[65]

When middleman enthusiasts speak of Japanese Americans as a middleman minority, do they mean Issei, Nisei, Sansei, or Yonsei? Different generations and the process of becoming and being American are not considered in the blanket application of the theory to America. Is it possible that third- and fourth-generation Japanese Americans are still considered to be aliens living in a "host" society? It is curious at best that Chinese and Japanese Americans, unlike the descendents of white immigrants, are assumed to be sojourners from one generation to another. Whether discussing Chinese or Japanese Americans, middleman theorists have failed to accept the American identity of those groups, as they have failed to understand that far from being sojourners, Asian Americans are "here to stay."[66]

In pointing up the mythical properties of the theory, the linkage between sojourning and occupational preferences is the most critical element in dealing with the essence of middleman minority theory--liquidity. The causal relationship between sojourning and liquidity is stated by middleman theorists with unswerving conviction and deliberation. "Sojourning...leads the individual to select occupations which do not tie him to the territory for long periods."[67] Thus, "sojourning is important in

that it creates a preference for liquidity...."[68] What is overlooked in attempting to depict Chinese and Japanese Americans as middleman minorities is anti-Asiatic racism--rather than sojourning--as the factor that largely determined the occupational direction of those groups. The assumption that Asian Americans were not interested in occupations that would tie them to the territory (America) is empirically untrue.

The Japanese Americans were definitively interested in owning and working their own land. With the exception of Hawaii, where Japanese were specifically recruited to replace the Chinese on the sugar plantations, initial occupational orientation of the Japanese in America was diverse. However, when "the Japanese realized they were not wanted among the laboring ranks (because of discrimination), they chose to become small independent farmers."[69] As agricultural laborers, contrary to persisting images of Japanese competition with whites, the Japanese were used in specialized areas, "chiefly during cultivation and harvest and found practically no employment on general; that is, non-specialized farms."[70] Far from competing with white agricultural laborers, the Japanese were observed in a very different light: `Let us be very blunt and say that the Japanese never displaced white men.'[71] "They drove no one out of employment, for, in truth, there was a shortage of labor."[72] More importantly, contradicting images of overcompetition and monopoly, Japanese were discriminated against in the quality of the land they could lease, invariably being `waste land' covered with `hardpan.'[73] The land available to the Japanese Americans

was not being cultivated by whites or anyone else at the time. Indeed, it was generally "regarded as worthless."[74]

In contradistinction to the assertion that as sojourners the Japanese had no interest in the land, it was the question of land ownership that catalyzed the anti-Japanese movement in California. In the tradition of anti-Chinese racism, the anti-Japanese adherents were responsible for instituting legal barriers to Japanese American investment in the land. "It was this ambition--land hunger--that resulted in the hysterical campaign against the Japanese, which, tapping the current of feeling that had been developed against the Chinese, culminated in the enactment of an Alien Land Act in 1913 (re-enacted in 1919); and the Federal restriction on further Japanese immigration in 1924."[74] Although one loophole in the Alien Land Act was that Japanese "though barred from purchasing land in their own names, could buy it on behalf of their citizen offspring,"[75] not all Japanese who desired land necessarily had offspring. Such intentional deterrents doubtless interfered with the acquisition of land. What is most important in critically analyzing middleman minority theory, however, is the undeniable fact that anti-Asiatic racial discrimination and the institution of anti-Asiatic legislation "prevented the Asiatics from getting a firm foothod and permanent position in the community."[76] It was racism and discrimination--not sojourning--that discouraged and prevented Asian American investment in the land, destroying in the process what should have been the beginning of the Asian immigrants' version of the American Dream.

Other middleman claims that certain industries were

dominated by the Chinese, whose competition presumably undercut white labor through a network of ethnic solidarity, are considerably off the mark. Most notably, in the shoe and boot industry in San Francisco, Ping Chiu's economic study of Chinese Labor in California, 1850-1880 incisively points out the inaccuracy of such claims against the Chinese:

> ...the degree of competition has been greatly exaggerated. First of all, Eastern (East Coast) imports set price levels in California and Chinese and white shops competed only within this framework. Secondly, there were product and job differentiations between the white and the Chinese firms as early as 1870. Of the 2,501 shoe makers in California in 1870, only 392 were Chinese. Of these, 182 were slipper makers according to the Manuscript Population Census. Moreover, a considerable portion of the remaining were in ladies' and boy's boot or shoe manufacturing. White shops and workers shunned these because of their low price and profit margin.[77]

Intensive, open competition in the shoe and boot industry was not between the Chinese, as a middleman minority, and the whites--but rather between California white men and Massachusetts white men.[78] Moreover, what competition there was between the Chinese and whites usually took place on the smaller-shop level in the custom trade. Even then, "...the survival of these (white shops) was threatened not by Chinese competition but by the diminishing market for high priced boots. They were victims of a changing consumption pattern instead of cheap labor."[79] That the Chinese and Japanese Americans have been both praised and condemned as presumed unfair competitors with whites is part of the ongoing practice of praising the victim while ignoring the process of

victimization. It is also the final bridge bringing middleman theory full circle in the belief that those groups have selected their occupations specifically for the purpose of their liquid base. Thus, it is the last stage in the arbitrary depiction of Chinese and Japanese Americans as permanent aliens, sojourners in the fabric of American society.

A MYTH DEBUNKED

The middleman minority theorists' accusation that Chinese and Japanese Americans select the liquid independent professions and other "portable" occupations at the express dictum of their sojourning is at complete variance with the socioeconomic realities of Asian American social history. Likewise, the effort to depict the attempted achievement of the fundamental American goals of social "independence and advancement"[80] as an almost conspiratorial move on the part of those groups to create and maintain their liquidity has no basis in fact. In the first instance, selection of occupation implies freedom of choice. Secondly, freedom of choice demands equality of opportunity and the social mobility with which to maximize that opportunity. Middleman enthusiasts' presumptions can be dealt with by raising and addressing three important questions: 1) At the height and during the era of intense anti-Asiatic racism, did the Chinese and Japanese immigrants have the freedom with which tc select their occupations? 2) With the lessening of overt anti-Asianism, which occupational opportunities were opened to the Asian groups? 3) And, most importantly, what was the actual motivation behind

the selection of occupations by the Chinese and Japanese Americans?

In response to the first question, it is generally agreed that the Chinese and Japanese immigrants, as racial minorities who had little else to offer save for their labor in a labor-intensive market, were forced into occupations that "had either remained unexploited by Caucasians for whatever reason, or had been rejected because the work involved was too onerous (for whites to do)."[81] What "selection" they may have had was severely circumscribed and restricted within the confines of anti-Asiatic racism. They were not free in the sense that all markets at all levels were open to them. Officially classified as aliens ineligible for citizenship by law--largely at the initiative of racists and political opportunists--Chinese and Japanese were literally barred from occupations that promised security, mobility and prestige, for "many states required citizenship"[82] as a requisite for entrance into those occupations. Additionally, in areas that did not immediately exclude them by law (e.g., mining, pile tailings scavaging, wasteland cultivation, small shop manufacturing), exorbitant taxation, anti-Asian violence, and subsequent enactment of local, state and national laws inhibited Chinese and Japanese participation and competition. Essentially what remained open to the Chinese was "women's work"--washing clothes in "hand" laundries and cooking in restaurants. The Japanese were shouldered into truck farming (devoid of security in the land) and gardening (an ignominious relegation of their agricultural expertise and creativity).[83]

The response to the second question, expanding occupational opportunities, necessarily comes in the person of the much larger social implications of the post-World War II era in American history. Indeed, the gap between American social theory and practice, if not significantly narrowed in the short run, became undeniably apparent to all strata of American society, including ethnic groups (regardless of color) who had experienced discrimination and deprivation. As Stein and Hill posit:

> The discrepancy between the ideal and the real became apparent in the war effort itself, leading to the riots in the service and the cities. The war had heightened idealism and expectancy; surely a nation that fought and defeated nazism and fascism ought to practice democracy and egalitarianism at home. The changes beginning in the 1950s were an attempt to translate the ideal into reality by transforming society itself and demanding that it live up to its promises. The postwar era, climaxing with the Kennedy frontier, promised the realization of the American Dream. The only limits were the imagination and the boundless will. The war had radically opened up an abyss of freedom, a freedom which many Americans later feared they could not contain.[84]

Chinese Americans, who even before the war stressed education as a possible way of breaking out of the laundry-restaurant syndrome, were for the first time provided opportunities in the war industries (aircraft factories, shipyards, etc.).[85] Engineering, chemistry, and other majors in the sciences, who prior to the hostilities "had little chance of being hired by a white firm,"[86] found their intellectual labor as welcomed by whites as had been (initially, at least) their fathers' physical labor. Negative stereotypes of the Chinese as unfair competitors who could labor incessantly became positive ones, stressing high "productivity perceptions"[87] and

"cleverness...and calculability"[88] in tactile and arithmetic/mathematical skills. However, physical and social distance persisted.[89]

Japanese Americans, during the war years, were victimized by a mixture of war hysteria and anti-Japanese prejudice. Approximately 110,000 Issei and Nisei, 70% of whom were American-born citizens, were put into American concentration camps. For them, the duration of the war obliterated all opportunities save one, and even that with some initial objection from racists: Japanese Americans were given the opportunity to fight and die in the war, "proving their loyalty to the United States."[90] Japanese American soldiery became a literal legend while in the field. As an observation, it is curious that middleman minority enthusiasts offer no theoretical comment during this disturbing interlude in American history. One might posit that with this presumed middleman minority safely housed behind barbed wire, the brunt of the burden fell upon the shoulders of the Chinese Americans. As presumed buffer groups, however, during and after the war neither the Chinese nor the Japanese Americans absorbed the friction between whites and blacks.

Lastly, a response to the third question must be prefaced by noting the fact that "it was not until after World War II"[91] that anything approaching freedom of choice and equal opportunity in the marketplace was opened up to the Chinese and Japanese. The early immigrant years appear to be the most supportive of the sojourner image of the groups. Yet freedom of choice and opportunity "to select" liquid occupations (with the exception of physical labor, which is universally liquid) of the kind

identified by the middleman theorists either were denied the Chinese and Japanese outright, incrementally, or were nonexisting as realizable goals.

In the years following World War II, Chinese and Japanese American pursuance of careers of a presumed liquid nature, particularly in the independent professions, was a function of the liberalizing or repeal of barriers that were designed either to keep the Chinese and Japanese out of America or to perpetuate their "alien" status. The decision to reappraise immigration policy, beginning with the token repeal of the exclusion laws in 1943, up to and including the 1965 Immigration Act, and the passage of the Walter-McCarran Act in 1952, striking down race as a "legitimate factor barring one from U.S. citizenship,"[92] served two profoundly important services in directing the future of the Chinese and Japanese. First, they were positive signs along the long road (still continuing) of accepting those groups as Americans; and second, they were manifest incentives among those Chinese and Japanese who might have had a predisposition to sojourn to cease that intention. For the majority of Asians in America, however, such decisions were most of all a long overdue redress of grievances against traditional anti-Asian inhospitality. Thus, in keeping with American immigrant patterns, the Chinese and Japanese began the task of elevating themselves socioeconomically, of putting into practice the theory of freedom and advancement so symbolic of the process of becoming and being American.

That three-fourths of the members of the Chinese American

minority group are citizens,[93] and an even higher percentage of the members of the Japanese American minority group are citizens, is testimony to the pull of the American Dream. The Asian American population has increased whenever barriers to their becoming Americans have not interfered with the process. To be sure, the concept of sojourning is a thing of the past, at best a romantic notion in the minds of a few who idealize the "old country." Chinese and Japanese Americans, whether naturalized or native-born, have been and are as predictable as other descendents of the international immigrant pool in their desire to raise themselves from the world of physical/manual labor to that of mental/intellectual work. Hence, rather than being unusual in their occupational preference pattern because of presumed middleman/sojourner status, Chinese and Japanese Americans have selected their occupations on the basis of "occupational independence and prestige,"[94] not on the basis of liquidity. Indeed, research on occupational prestige ratings are remarkably similar throughout the world. The Chinese and Japanese pattern is not only indicative of the American prestige scale, but also of that characteristic of the international order which does not vary "by occupational position, ethnic group membership, or sex, despite the relationship of these factors to differential life chances:[95]

> In all societies, ranging from highly industrialized nations like the United States to peasant villages in up-country Thailand, the basic pattern of occupational evaluations is the same--professional and higher managerial positions are most highly regarded, lower white-collar and skilled blue-collar jobs fall in the middle of the hierarchy, and unskilled and service and laboring jobs are the least respected.[96]

It is natural and understandable that the Chinese and Japanese Americans, aware of discrimination, seek out occupations that will provide them greater independence as well as income and social prestige. Considering their great emphasis upon education as the propellant with which to achieve a better life, the Chinese and Japanese have invested time and energy into the development of their mental abilities, an investment that helps them achieve these goals.[96]

Years of School Completed by Persons 25 Years and Over, by Race, 1970 (in percentage)

	Chinese	White	Black	Japanese
Total number of 25 years	227,165	109,900,000	10,375,000	353,707
No schooling	11.1	1.6	3.3	1.8
Elementary				
1-4 years	5.1	3.9	11.3	2.4
5-7 years	10.7	8.3	18.7	6.3
8 years	5.6	13.6	10.5	8.5
High School				
1-3 years	9.7	16.5	24.8	12.3
4 years	21.2	35.2	21.2	39.3
College				
1-3 years	11.0	10.7	5.9	13.6
4 years or more	25.6	11.6	4.4	15.9
Median School years	12.4	12.2	9.8	12.5
Percent high school graduates	57.8	52.3	31.4	68.8

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Subject Reports, PC(1)C1, PC(2)1B, PC(2)1G (1970), 97.

However, despite the observation that the Chinese and Japanese generally exhibit an impressive educational pattern that is "job-oriented" in the "`secure´ professions,"[98] persistent anti-Asian racism in the non-scientific fields, especially those that might ultimately expose the nature of anti-Asian racism, is a reality that many Asian Americans try to avoid in making their career decisions. The consensus, too, remains persistent:

> The phenomenal increase of Chinese professional men is presently a matter of common knowledge. But there persists a reluctance to employ Chinese in the field of social science. It has been difficult for Chinese students of the humanities or social sciences to join college faculties, although students of the natural and biological sciences find their entrance facil.99

Within the academic marketplace institutional anti-Asian racism is an omnipresent reminder to Asian Americans that, rather than being middleman within the white-black racial dyad, they are dealt with differentially outside of the dyad:

> ...,Asians lag significantly behind both blacks and whites with similar professional qualifications $2,000 or $3,000 in every field for any given level of degree and any given number of articles published in natural sciences. In the humanities, Orientals with five or more articles earned nearly $2,000 less than blacks and nearly $4,000 less than whites with the same publication records.100

Consequently, it is standard operating procedure for the majority of Chinese and Japanese, using education as the springboard from which to launch their occupational careers, to avoid areas that court "uncertainty, ambiguity, and unpredictability,"[101] namely, the humanities, arts, and social sciences.[102]

What is important to keep in mind in any discussion of Asian American occupational patterns, however, is that there is literally nothing in research or statistical data that would

begin to suggest that liquidity in the specific context of middleman minority theory has anything to do with occupational preferences. Nor is there anything to support the static view that Chinese and Japanese Americans are, or consider themselves to be, "sojourners."

Concluding comments. The primary purpose of this manuscript has been to cast doubt on the assumptions and presumptions inherent in middleman minority theory and challenge their credibility and validity in the specific case of the Chinese and Japanese Americans. Underlying what has been identified as the locus of the theory--occupational liquidity as a function of sojourning--is the belief that Chinese and Japanese Americans qualify for the label "sojourner." This belief is akin to an earlier one espoused by anti-Asiatic racists, viz., that Asian immigrants were "unassimilable." Moreover, by implication, is the secondary assumption that America is more racist than it is. Despite lingering pockets of anti-Asian racism, and marketplace discrimination, it is hardly realistic (or empirically provable) to suggest that Chinese and Japanese Americans face the daily social psychological dilemma/possibility, via their presumed sojourner status, that they might be put upon or even ejected by their "host society." Again, the arbitrary classification of those two groups generates a "foreign" or "alien" imagery that does not today square with reality. Nor is there any indication that Chinese and Japanese Americans perceive their country or their fellow countrymen on the verge of turning upon them for whatever reason.

Yet the theory persists unchallenged. It is accepted, usually piecemeal and without an appreciation of the working parts of the theory itself. Perhaps that is the key to its acceptability. If one does not know what to do with the Chinese and Japanese minorities, one can always push them aside by assuming that they are middleman something or other.

The secondary purpose is in close association with the primary, namely, to raise questions concerning the Chinese and Japanese Americans not only in the context of middleman minority theory, but also in relationship to the white-black racial dyad. A significant portion of the "model minority" thesis constitutes what can be called the "socioeconomic bias" (the SES bias) that is everywhere present in studies on race and ethnic relations. As the underpinning of the hierarchy of discriminatory pathology, complete with agendas of relative social deprivation, and the reverse reward system, the SES-bias has been used in such a fashion as to emphasize the minority status of blacks and to deemphasize the minority status of Chinese and Japanese Americans. Although there is not enough space here to give a thorough going-over to the many assumptions and presumptions associated with the SES-bias and its use against the two Asian groups, a succinct observation can be presented:

> ...Asian American males, on the whole, are underemployed, underpaid, or both; and they have certainly not achieved middle-class status as measured by economic indices. Since their status is a good measure of the relative status of Asian Americans as a group, one must conclude that the celebration of their phenomenal "success" as the "model minority" is at best premature, and at worse, a devious deception.103

The assumption within the assumption that Chinese and Japanese Americans are middle class is that which tacitly and automatically concludes: To be a middle class minority is to be a middleman minority. But is being middle class synonymous with being a middleman? Is a group's social function determined by its socioeconomic characteristics? Such simplistic and linear logic appears to be endemic to middleman minority theory.

Avoided in discussions of Chinese and Japanese Americans as middleman minorities is the political counterpart of SES. Few who praise the Asian Americans by flaunting statistics that showcase their SES have turned the coin in order to examine what can be called their "sociopolitical status" or SPS. The complexities of SPS rival those of SES. Empirical studies should be conducted comparing the various ethnic and racial minority groups in America before even tentative conclusions can be drawn regarding the overall status of given groups. Studies comparing Chinese and Japanese Americans with blacks on measures of SPS can prove to be invaluable in determining degrees of political power not only between given minority groups and whites, but also between and among various minority groups. In that sense, blacks could well be the middleman minority between the white majority and the non-white/non-black numerical minorities. Ultimately the entire theory of the reverse minority hierarchy should be tested empirically.

The arbitrary treatment of Chinese and Japanese by middleman enthusiasts should or can generate as many separate and necessary studies as there are assumptions and presumptions along the entire constructional framework of the theory. For example, to

what extent have the Chinese and Japanese actually fulfilled the social role of "buffer group," "social shock absorbers," or "social stabilizers," within the white-black racial dyad? Demographically speaking, is it reasonable to assume that the Chinese and Japanese who have been heavily concentrated on the west coast and Hawaii serve as a "transmission belt" between whites and blacks whose relations, until recent times, have largely been split between north and south? On distribution of such numerically small groups, can the Chinese and Japanese have ever had substantive contact with blacks over time? Have Chinese and Japanese small businessmen, in Chinatowns and Japantowns, had a predominantly black clientele? Or is it more in keeping with reality to suggest that within the ethnic Chinese and Japanese communities the clientele has been overwhelmingly ethnic Chinese and Japanese, with whites as secondary clientele of the curio shop/restaurant variety? As presumed exploitative middlemen, have the Chinese and Japanese small businessmen dominated the economies of black communities across America? Or have blacks and others done so? Indeed, as supposed middlemen between whites and blacks, is it plausible to suggest that Chinese and Japanese Americans are the groups through whom the masses (the blacks) have been able to obtain goods and services as well as to engage in social discourse with the elite (the whites)?

In conclusion, the complex economic, political and social issues that are raised by middleman minority theory do not permit of simplistic analyses, explanations, or conclusions. Nothing short of an entire, new look at the American system of race and

ethnic relations will do. To that end, theoretical and empirical research on America's Asian minorities if nothing else will take us at least beyond the white-black racial dyad. And, of course, there is the abiding faith that Myths will always succumb to Verities.

REFERENCE FOOTNOTES

[1] The first definitive attempt to include Chinese and Japanese Americans as middleman minorities appeared in Edna Bonacich's article "A Theory of Middleman Minorities," American Sociological Review, 1973, Vol. 38 (October): 583-594. Many of the constructional elements of the theory as applied to the Chinese and Japanese Americans are taken from that article.

[2] See, for example: Howard Becker, Man in Reciprocity (New York: Praeger, 1956); R.A. Schermerhorn, Comparative Ethnic Relations (New York: Random House, 1970); and Sheldon Stryker, "Social Structure and Prejudice," Social Problems, 6 (Spring).

[3] The theory per se remains underdeveloped in its application to industrialized societies such as the United States.

[4] Hubert M. Blalock, Jr., Toward a Theory of Minority Group Relations (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1967), p. 83.

[5] Middleman minorities often move into the commercial area. In pre-industrial Europe merchants were looked upon as persons engaged in a socially repellent, however necessary, occupation.

[6] Edna Bonacich, "A Theory of Middleman Minorities," American Sociological Review, Volume 38 (October, 1973), p. 589.

[7] Ibid., p. 588.

[8] Ibid., p. 588.

[9] Blalock, p. 81.

[10] Ibid., p. 83.

[11] Ibid., p. 82.

12

Periods of intense fear and dread of the Chinese minority as a potential rival of the European elites in Southeast Asia often ended in anti-Chinese pogroms initiated by the Europeans among the indigenous populations.

13

Bonacich refers to the Jamaican Chinese as a middleman minority in order to extend the theory from Southeast Asia to the Western Hemisphere, believing as she does that any overseas Chinese must constitute a middleman group. However, she fails to cite the contradictory status of the Chinese of Guyana who through intermarriage with blacks have nearly miscegenated themselves out of existence. Consequently, they "have maintained only a very attenuated form of their native culture," literally giving up "their Chinese names along with the language." See the Area Handbook for Guyana, Da Pam 550-82, November, 1969, U.S. GPO, pp. 61-62.

14

W.F. Wertheim, East-West Parallels: Sociological Approaches to Modern Asia (The Hague, W. Van Hoeve LTD, 1964), p. 59.

15

Carey McWilliams, Prejudice, Japanese Americans: Symbol of Racial Intolerance (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1945), p. 324.

16

Eugene Franklin Wong, On Visual Media Racism: Asians in the American Motion Pictures (New York: Arno Press, 1978), pp. 144-145.

17

American social scientists of Asian descent concurred with extending the middleman minority theory to the United States and followed the lead of established white American social scientists. They suffered intense frustration in trying to place the Asian American minorities within America's biracial (white and black) mentality. They settled for the middleman theory as the most viable way of at least including Asian Americans as part of the American ethnic scheme. That justification for the promulgation of the theory was based upon superficial analogies with the overseas Chinese of Southeast Asia has in no way interfered with the acceptance of the theory's applicability to Chinese and Japanese Americans. Nor, apparently, has the realization that the white social scientists who endorse the theory remain devoid of a substantive knowledge, understanding or appreciation of the economic, political, and social history of Chinese and Japanese Americans weakened the presumed legitimacy of the extention of the theory to America. The overseas Chinese of Southeast Asia continue to be the group around whom the constructional framework of the theory is built. Cf. Harry H.L. Kitano, "Japanese Americans: The Development of a Middleman Minority," Pacific Historical Review, 43, 4 (November, 1974), p. 511.

18 J.S. Furnivall, Colonial Policy and Practice: A Comparative Study of Burma and Netherlands India (New York: New York University Press, 1956), p. 232.

19 For a general description and definition of a sojourner, see: Paul C.P. Siu, "The Sojourner," The American Journal of Sociology, Volume 18, No. 1 (July, 1952).

20 Furnivall, pp. 232-233.

21 William E. Willmott, The Chinese of Semarang: A Changing Minority Community of Indonesia (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1960), p. 86.

22 Ibid., p. 96.

23 The conviction that the Chinese minority in Southeast Asia constitutes a pro-communist element was brought into devastating and genocidal perspective in 1965 in Indonesia, when "an estimated 300,000 to 400,000 Indonesian `communists' (many of them apolitical Indonesian Chinese) were slaughtered in the greatest postwar disaster to befall any group and the greatest single act of mass murder since World War II." Michael Parenti, The Anti-Communist Impulse (New York: Random House, 1969), p. 189.

24 Wertheim, op. cit., p. 52. Also, the creation of physically separate Chinese communities in Southeast Asia was "mostly due to the policies of colonial governments," thereby making the Chinese easy targets of Southeast Asian violence. See: S.W. Kung, Chinese in American Life: Some Aspects of Their History, Status, Problems, and Contributions (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1962), p. 176.

25 Ibid., p. 54.

26 Special Operations Research Office, U.S. Army Area Handbook for Vietnam (Washington, D.C.: The American University, 1962), p. 208.

27 W.E. Willmott, "The Chinese in Southeast Asia," Australian Outlook, Volume 20, No. 3 (December, 1966), p. 256.

28
Bonacich, p. 584.

29
Ibid., p. 585.

30
Ford H. Kuramoto, "What Do Asians Want? An Examination of Issues in Social Work Education," Journal of Education for Social Work, Council on Social Work Education, Volume 7, No. 3 (Fall, 1971), p. 11.

31
James I. Wong, Aspirations and Frustrations of the Chinese Youth in the San Francisco Bay Area: Aspersions upon the Societal Scheme (San Francisco: R and E Research Associates, 1977), p. 26.

32
Alan Nishio, "The Oriental as a `Middleman Minority,'" Gidra (May, 1969), p. 3.

33
For evidence of the consequences of the masked negativity of positive stereotypes as applied to Asians in general and the Asian elderly in particular, see: Eugene Franklin Wong, "Learned Helplessness: The Need for Self-Determinism Among the Chinese American Elderly," The Journal of Ethnic Studies, 8:2 (September, 1980).

34
Often times when Asian Americans apply for "jobs in minority programs" they are "rejected" on the basis of their not being classified as minorities. See: Chia-ling Kuo, Social and Political Change in New York's Chinatown, The Role of Voluntary Associations (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1977), p. 134.

35
"Success Story of One Minority Group in U.S.," U.S. News & World Report, December 26, 1966, p. 73.

36
Ibid., p. 73.

37
Julian Makaroff, "America's Other Racial Minority, Why Japanese-Americans Fare Better Than U.S. Negroes," Eastern World, November/December, 1966, p. 18.

38
Ibid., p. 17.

39
William Peterson, "Success Story, Japanese-American Style," New York Times, January 9, 1966, p. 21.

40 Wong, On Visual Media Racism, pp. 14-29.

41 Perhaps a more appropriate term might be non-Asian Americans, given America's ethnic mix.

42 H. Brett Melendy, Asians in America: Filipinos, Koreans, and East Indians (Boston, Massachusetts: Twayne Publishers, 1977), pp. 137-138.

43 Harry H.L. Kitano and Stanley Sue, "The Model Minorities," Journal of Social Issues, Volume 29, No. 2 (1973), p. 1.

44 Report of the National Advisory Committee on Civil Disorders, 1967, p. 1.

45 Colin Watanabe, "Self-Expression and the Asian-American Experience," Personnel and Guidance Journal, Volume 51 (February-June, 1973), pp. 390-391.

46 Betty Lee Sung, A Survey of Chinese-American Manpower and Employment (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1976), p. 167.

47 Ibid., p. 167.

48 It is not uncommon for non-Asians to assert that Asian Americans are not a minority. See, for example: Robert M. Jiobu, "Earnings Differentials Between Whites and Ethnic Minorities: The Cases of Asian Americans, Blacks, and Chicanos," Sociology and Social Research, Volume 61, No. 1 (October, 1976), p. 25.

49 Sung, op. cit., p. 167.

50 James W. Loewen, The Mississippi Chinese: Between Blacks and White (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 73.

51 Ibid., p. 182.

52 Bonacich, p. 588.

[53] Loewen, p. 36.

[54] Ibid., p. 37.

[55] Ibid., p. 50.

[56] Bonacich, p. 585.

[57] Ibid., p. 585.

[58] Ibid., p. 585.

[59] Ibid., p. 588.

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> Migration to the mines and mills of the urban-industrial east and east-central United States was at first regarded by most workers as an extended "season" away from home. The frequently expressed purpose of migration was economic: to work for a year or two, enduring the hazards and the filth, amassing as much income as possible in order to return home and purchase additional land, or build a better home. Many came to the United States several times, deciding with their second or third return migration to settle in the United States....The early immigration was almost exclusively that of males, for there was no reason to bring one's family to America. America meant instant wealth, which would be translated into prosperity and higher social status upon one's return to family, parish, and village. [Howard F. Stein and Robert F. Hill, The Ethnic Imperative, Examining the New White Ethnic Movement (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977), pp. 27-28.]

Whether Estonians, Slovakians, or Italians, all had their share of "sojourners." But when considering white European groups, social scientists concede a beginning yet also an end to the sojourning phenomenon. They treat and accept the European immigrants as Americans and not as permanent sojourners--especially across several generations. Thus they observe:

> ...one cannot radically dichotomize between and initial emigration purely for the purposes of finding temporary work and the decision to settle in America. The pull of the American dream was present from the beginning in preemigrant life, and its force was only increased by the discrepancy between the first experience in America and life in the natal village, which one left or to

which one reluctantly returned several times. [Ibid., p. 32.]

Later attempts to modify the static nature of middleman minority theory have resulted in a loosening not a tightening of its structure. The present criticism that the theory does not account for change in the status of the middleman minority group cross-generationally is exemplified in the increasing awareness of that weakness coupled with a muddled attempt to hedge on theoretical principles.

The observation that occupational changes of middleman minority members account for change of status cross-generationally is in keeping, ironically, with the theory's original intent that such change is actually a further development of occupational liquidity. Bonacich's later pronouncement, presumably accounting for change in status, that "...some children and grandchildren of immigrant small-business participant move into professions...make it difficult to establish precise boundaries...to decide whether these relatively more assimilated people are still part of a middleman minority" is a compound-complex contradiction of the theory itself. [Edna Bonacich and John Modell, The Economic Basis of Ethnic Solidarity: Small Business in the Japanese American Community (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), p. 23.] It is precisely this movement into the "professions" (Bonacich, 1973) that hallmarks the occupational sophistication of the middleman minority's "liquidity."

There is a new delineation between the middleman minority group and group members inherent in the presumed modification of the theory to accommodate cross-generational change in status. The vulgarization of theory is that the middleman minority enthusiasts no longer discuss the minority as a group, but rather certain members of the group. The ethnic identity of the group, then, becomes less important than the characteristics of an unspecified and select few within the group that might conform to the theory's specifications. Conceivably, any member of any group might qualify as a middleman. It would be more appropriate to speak of middleman minority persons instead of middleman minority groups.

Lastly, the initial characterization of middleman minority group traits specifically noted, in emphasizing the "sojourner" image, that "Middleman minorities" demonstrate "a residence to out-marriage" (Bonacich, 1973). The two immediate shortcomings of this reference to out-marriage is that all ethnic groups initially practice endogomy and--in the case of Chinese and Japanese Americans--miscegenation laws prevented their intermarrying with American white women. Most importantly, is that the later modification of the theory posits, in contradiction to its "trait" list, that "...many members of the ethnic group leave the community, intermarry, and shed their ethnic identity" (Bonacich and Modell, 1980). It would appear that middleman minority theorists are confused on a number of

issues: who is or is not a minority? Is it an entire ethnic group? Or a select membership within that group? When does the assumption of middleman minority function begin? When does it end? Is occupational movement from labor to business to the professions indicative of achieving "liquidity" or freedom from the label "middleman minority"?

61 Ibid., p. 32.

62 Ibid., p. 32.

63 One of the earliest usages of the "sojourner" image can be traced to the Reverend W. Speer whose missionary emphasis upon the image was a product of his envisionment of a legion of converted Chinese Christians, bloated with a prosletyzing spirit, who would travel back to China to convert their heathen brethren. Others, particularly members of the anti-Chinese movement, seized upon the sojourner concept to justify their accusations that the Chinese were, unlike other immigrants, in America only to make money (to exploit American resources) and then return to China. An attending accusation was that the Chinese were "unassimilable" and therefore constituted an unmeltable and temporary alien element that should be invited to leave America as soon as possible. The persistence of the image of the Chinese as sojourners has been challenged on the basis of empirical evidence, the conclusion of which is observed:

> It is a simple, irrefutable fact that today Chinese Americans can trace their genealogy to as many as six generations of American ancestors. This phenomenon belies the sojourner description. If those men from the Middle Kongdom were indeed temporary laborers who worked in America only to return to China with some accumulation of wealth, then how do we explain the maintenance of a Chinese American community, culture, and society since the mid-nineteenth century? The obvious answer, that laborers from China were immigrants rather than migrants, has not been given serious attention. Had the term been subject to scrutiny in light of the social history of the Chinese American community of Southern California, it is doubtful that the acceptability of this description would have remained as pervasive as it is today. See: Raymond Lou, "The Chinese American Community of Los Angeles, 1870-1900: A Case of Resistance, Organization, and Participation." Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Irvine, 1982, pp. 342-343.

64 William Meyers (ed.), China Policy: New Priorities and Alternatives (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1972), p. 46.

65 Sung, p. 208.

66 Ibid., p. 18.

67 Bonacich, p. 585.

68 Ibid., p. 588.

69 John A. Gothberg, "Press Reaction to Japanese Land Ownership in California," Journalism Quarterly (Winter, 1970), p. 667.

70 Carey McWilliams, Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California (USA: Archon Books, 1969), pp. 106-107.

71 Ibid., p. 108.

72 Ibid., p. 108.

73 Ibid., p. 109.

74 Ibid., p. 112.

75 Stanford M. Lyman, Chinese Americans (New York: Random House, Inc., 1974), p. 114.

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77 Ping Chiu, Chinese Labor in California, 1850-1880: An Economic Study (Madison, Wisconsin: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1967), p. 107.

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80 Michael Novak, The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1973), p. 108.

81 Sheila E. Henry, Cultural Persistence and Socio Economic Mobility: A Comparative Study of Assimilation Among Armenians and Japanese in Los Angeles (San Francisco, California: R & E Research Associates, Inc., 1978), pp. 22-23.

82 S.W. Kung, Chinese in American Life, Some Aspects of Their History, Status, Problems, and Contributions (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1962), p. 180.

83 Frank F. Chuman, The Bamboo People: The Law and Japanese-Americans (Del Mar, California: Publisher's Inc., 1976), pp. 110 and 117.

84 Stein and Hill, op. cit., p. 91.

85 Beulah Ong Kwoh, "The Occupational Status of American-Born Chinese Male College Graduates," The American Journal of Sociology, Volume LIII (July, 1947-May, 1948), p. 193.

86 Ibid., p. 193.

87 Jared J. Young, Discrimination, Income, Human Capital Investment, and Asian-Americans (San Francisco: R and E Research Associates, Inc., 1977), pp. 45-46.

88 Lyman, op. cit., p. 135.

89 Young, op. cit., p. 48.

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91 Budd Fukei, The Japanese American Story (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Dillon Press, Inc., 1976), p. 95.

92 Chuman, op. cit., p. 229.

93 Sung, p. 27.

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Kwoh, p. 193.

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Donald J. Treiman, Occupational Prestige in Comparative Perspective (New York: Academic Press, 1977), pp. 66-67.

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Wong, Aspirations, p. 16.

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Chun-tu Hsueh (ed.), Asian Political Scientists in North America: Professional and Ethnic Problems, Occasional Papers/Reprints Series in Contemporary Asian Studies, No. 5 (School of Law, University of Maryland, 1977), p. 6.

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Ibid., p. 121.

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Bob H. Suzuki, "Education and the Socialization of Asian Americans: A Revisionist Analysis of the `Model Minority' Thesis," Amerasia Journal, 4:2 *1977), p. 41.